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Sociomateriality and disabled individuals' identity work: a critical poststructuralist research agenda

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Abstract

This paper responds to calls to rebalance the role of materiality in identity work. Taking a critical poststructuralist approach to identity work and a relational ontology perspective on sociomateriality, we explore how a 'disabled' person's identity work is shaped by and responds to the influences of embodied practices and material arrangements within the workplace. We achieve this by reviewing the notion of sociomateriality as a "constitutive entanglement" (Orlikowski, 2007: 1437) of the material and the human. More specifically, we discuss how disabled individuals are constituted through sociomaterial relations and practices involving the body, assistive technology and mundane artefacts. This paper, therefore, contributes to the emerging interest, in identity studies, on the role of the material within identity work, and, in Disability Studies, to the entanglement of the social and material in constructions of disability as difference.

Keywords: identity work, sociomateriality, constitutive entanglement, the body, sociomaterial relations and practices, assistive technology, mundane artefacts

Sociomateriality and disabled individuals' identity work: a critical poststructuralist research agenda

1 Introduction

The literature on 'identity work' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) reflects the varying ways in which individuals strive to maintain a distinctive and favourable self-identity. Bardon et al. (2012) argue that research on individuals' identity work is conducted mainly from an interpretive rather than a critical poststructuralist perspective, with the consequence that identity work tends to be conceptualized as 'identity talk'. Special Issues on identity (in *Organization*, 2008; *Human Relations*, 2009; *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 2012) have reflected this conceptualization. For instance, in the editors' introductions: Ybema et al. (2009: 299) suggest "it is the varieties of 'self-other' talk which emerge as the critical ingredient in processes of identity formation"; and Coupland and Brown (2012: 1) declare "our principal concern [in this Special Issue] is with subjectively construed discursive identities, i.e. identities as they are constituted through language". The discursive performance of identity involves ongoing "processes of negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside" (Ybema et al., 2009: 302). Processes of negotiation include discursive self-other positionings (Garcia and Hardy, 2007; McInnes and Corlett, 2012) which establish and signify relationships of "similarity and/or difference" (Garcia and Hardy, 2007: 363). They also involve individuals positioning themselves relative to the different 'discourses' to which they are exposed (Bardon et al., 2012) and the ideational notions of who they are and how they should act (McInnes and Corlett, 2012).

Researchers from this claimed 'interpretive perspective' on identity work/talk (Bardon et al., 2012) do recognize that a focus on the discursive performance of identity does not imply that "'identity' is nothing but talk" (Ybema et al., 2012: 304, emphasis in original). Identity work as talk is "enhanced, elaborated or secured through a variety of additional semiotics" (Ybema et al., 2009: 304), including bodily and symbolic acts, the use of artefacts, dress codes etc (Ybema et al., 2009; Coupland and Brown, 2012). Whilst such 'enhancements' reflect the materiality of identity and identity work, Bardon et al. (2012) argue that this over-emphasis on identity work as talk, and the focus on the linguistic aspects of discourse, has marginalized the role of materiality. In relation to the linguistic turn in social sciences more generally, Barad (2003: 801) claims, "Language has been granted too much power. ... Language matters. Discourse matters. ... [But] There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter". In their discussion of (dis)identification, Bardon et al. (2012) propose that exploring materiality may enhance possibilities of problematizing identity work. For instance, "bring[ing] back the material to the fore" of identity work (Bardon et al. 2012: 352) may surface the material conditions and circumstances in which individuals are embedded. In turn, and of particular relevance to our interest in disabled people, Bardon et al. (2012: 361) suggest that taking such a critical poststructuralist perspective may allow "the denunciation of inequalities in the shaping of individual becoming, because certain [prescribed corporate] ways of be(hav)ing will be less accessible to certain individuals than to others". More generally, in rebalancing a focus on the material, this paper attempts to address the question posed in the editors' introduction to the *Organization* Special Issue, that is "how does individual identity work respond to the influences of material arrangements and embodied practices?" (Alvesson et al., 2008: 19). We start to answer this question by further development of a conceptual framework to support this, and related, lines of inquiry.

To some extent, Symon and Pritchard's (2011: 2) research, which brought together ideas on identity work and sociomateriality, through the concept of 'sociomaterial identity', addresses this call for attention on the role of materiality in identity work. Symon and Pritchard (2011: 8) conceptualize identity as a "complex sociomaterial entanglement of role, person, artefacts, place and time, the elements of which are constructed and interweaved as an ongoing identity project". By exploring the "discursive alignment [or otherwise] of identity, performance and material artefacts" (Symon and Pritchard, 2011: 2), in their case of the use of smartphones at work, they maintain a focus on identity work as talk. However, they also discuss (dis)identification with the notion of the 'connected' worker by analysing whether and how identities are performed through "a seamless assemblage of the social and the material" (Symon and Pritchard, 2011: 2). Like Bardon et al. (2012), Symon and Pritchard (2011: 9) "encourage more 'enmeshing' of the theoretical fields of identity work, performative action and sociomateriality". Similarly, Symon (2011: 1) claims that there is a "pressing need" to understand the relationship between identity work and technology and, more generally, the material.

We address these calls by drawing on a relational ontological understanding of sociomateriality (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008), which emphasizes how the social and the material are "inextricably related" (Orlikowski, 2007: 1437) and "inherently inseparable" (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008: 456) (as shown by the non-hyphenated form of the word 'sociomaterial'). More specifically, we employ Orlikowski's (2007: 1437) notion of a "constitutive entanglement", which acknowledges that the social and the material are constitutively entangled in everyday life. From this relational ontological and process perspective, "Humans are constituted through relations of materiality, involving for example bodies, clothes, food, devices, tools, which, in turn, are produced through human practices" (Orlikowski, 2007: 1438). Materiality is intrinsic to everyday activities and relations for all of us (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008); artefacts mediate our embodied interactions. However, bodies, material artefacts and technologies assume particular importance in the day-to-day lives of many disabled individuals (Star, 1992; Moser and Law, 1999; Braidotti, 2002; Bloomfield, Latham and Vurdubakis, 2010; Moser, 2005, 2006). Our interest is less in how these material artefacts as devices and tools may be used to accomplish activities but more in how they are constitutive of identities (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008).

The notion of performativity (Barad, 2003) is central to sociomateriality, and highlights how relations between humans and technologies are enacted in practice (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008). This notion of performativity obviously aligns well with the idea of identity as a 'performance', not only in the discursive sense discussed above, but also in the bodily aspect of identity work. Identity cannot be understood without its association with a material body on which identity is imprinted (Campbell, 2009). "The way that physical signs of identity are performed through bodily work is an important part of the way such identities, and the power structures that inform them, are reproduced" (Kenny, Whittle and Willmott, 2011: 65). In other words, as Pullen (2007: 327) notes "bodies matter but bodies are different". Concerning the body as a physical sign, or carrier, of individual identity (Braidotti, 2002, 2003; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Meekosha, 1998; Morris, 1996; Wendell, 1996), any bodily impairment and difference from the socially accepted normative body (male, white, heterosexual, non-disabled) has been rendered in discourse in negative terms of pejoration (Braidotti, 2002). Braidotti (2002: 175) argues this "difference-as-pejoration fulfils a structural and constitutive function". The individual, medical interpretation of disability (see figure 1) intensifies the materiality of the embodied self and reinforces the social construction of the impaired body

as incomplete/broken/inferior and, hence, a ‘problem’ because of its deviance from ‘acceptable’ social and cultural norms. The concern for how disabled people are “constructed as negatively different” (Chouinard, 1999:143) through the constituting effects of ableism (the normative expectation of non-disability) is already recognized within the Disability Studies literature. Chouinard (1997:380) suggests ableism “refers to ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume ablebodiedness, and by so doing, construct persons with disabilities as marginalised...‘others’”. Recently, Williams and Mavin (2012) addressed the inadequate theorizing, within Organization Studies, of disability as a constructed and negated difference through assumed ableism, which shapes normative expectations within organizing contexts. The setup of organizational contexts and related sociomaterial practices tend to be based on the normative assumption of the able-bodied individual as the perfect human being (Mumby, 2008) and therefore replicate the discriminating structures of the social and cultural environment (Williams and Mavin, 2012; Harlan and Robert, 1998).

Williams and Mavin (2012) shed light on the under-researched field of disability within Organization Studies and of disabled individuals’ organising experiences, by introducing a ‘Disability Studies lens’ (figure 1). This lens, which aims de-marginalize experiences of disability in the workplace and surface the normative expectation of ableism, differentiates different discourses of disability (figure 2) and brings experiences of impairment (impairment effects) into Organization Studies research frames. Furthermore, Williams and Mavin (2012) argue that, rather than individualized problems, impairment effects (the effects of bodily variation) are legitimate organizing requirements. It is interesting to note that, whereas Braidotti (2002) omitted any meaningful examination of the role of impaired bodies in her theorizing of difference, subsequently she has focused attention on the social and embodied nature of the ‘impaired subject’, and called for a return of “impaired bodies to their material roots” (Roets and Braidotti, 2010: 161). Roets and Braidotti argue, as we do, that the body may be brought back in focus, via impairments and a relational process ontology. In this way, we intend to problematize how sociomaterial practices are based on the dominant normative discourse of ableism, and to highlight the influence of these practices for disabled peoples’ identity work.

This paper sets out to explore the role of sociomateriality in disabled individuals’ identity work in an organizational context. It thereby contributes to the research gap in relation to the newly emerging research interest in the sociomateriality of identity work (Symon and Pritchard, 2011; Symon, 2012; Bardon et al., 2012), and the discourse of ableism, and sociomaterial practices associated with it, in organizations (Williams and Mavin, 2012). The paper proceeds as follows. First, we confirm our understanding of the aim of sociomaterial-focused identity work research from a critical poststructuralist perspective. Second, we give an overview of sociomateriality and key theoretical perspectives on it. Whilst accepting that any distinction of humans and artefacts is analytical (Orlikowski, 2007: 1437), for analytical clarity, third, we discuss how disabled individuals are constituted in day-to-day organizational life through relations of materiality involving assistive technology and more mundane material artefacts and, fourth, we focus on human bodies as material for identity work.

2 Identity work from a critical poststructuralist sociomaterial perspective

In encouraging researchers to take into account the role of materiality, Bardon et al. (2012) are not advocating a structuralist and deterministic view of identity work. Rather researchers

should adopt “a materialist post-structuralism which not only explores how individuals’ identity is both the cause and consequence of language but also of material arrangements” (Bardon et al., 2012: 361). Similarly, Rhodes et al. (2007: 95) draw on Dale (2005) to claim much existing theory (in their case, about power, surveillance and identity) is both ‘de-materialized and disembodied’. They conclude that a needs remains to locate the materiality and empirically ‘real’ person into identity theorizing.

In proposing a more critical perspective on identity work, Bardon et al., (2012: 356) state that the focus of research should be on “the ‘socio-material actualization’ of identity regulation apparatuses”, that is the focus should move beyond the official rhetoric of identity regulation apparatuses to explore how they are actualized in practice. In their work, they employ Foucault’s (1977) notion “apparatus” which is understood as a

“thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures and scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions” (Foucault, 1977: 299, cited by Bardon et al. 2012: 355)

In this way, apparatuses are the precarious results of decentralized exercises of power in interaction which make the emergence of a given “regime of truth” possible (Bardon et al., 2012: 355). Apparatuses actualize “identities differently according to individuals’ position within the social environment conceptualized by Foucault as a matrix of power/knowledge” (Bardon et al., 2012: 355). Therefore, In the context of our research on disabled people this might mean exploring specific instances of the exercise of power, for instance embedded in the sanctioning (or otherwise) of assistive technology by managers to people with impairments.

Incorporating this critical perspective on identity work with the questions posed in the Call for Papers by the Third International Symposium on Process Organization Studies (Carlile et al. 2011), we propose that exploration of the role of materiality for identity work, from a poststructuralist critical perspective, may include:

- What is meant by the entanglement of the social and material in everyday organizational life and how can such entanglements be studied in relation to identity work?
- How is the sociomaterial actualized in practice and what is the influence on such practices for identity work?
- How should identity work (and regulation) be studied from a coherent sociomaterial perspective?
- What is the role of the body, technology, and artefacts in identity work?
- How do we think about affordances of the material world on what actors can or cannot do? How does this affect performativity, and identity work? What does this add to our understanding of ‘technology’?
- Does bringing in materiality make us conceptualize structure and agency or objectivity or subjectivity, concepts which are central to identity work, in new ways?

In this paper, we lay the theoretical foundations for addressing such questions in relation to disabled people’s identity work.

3 Sociomateriality in organizations – key theoretical perspectives

Orlikowski (2007) bases her argument for a ‘relational ontology’ of humans and technology to replace an ‘ontology of separateness’ on a key article by Barad (2003) who advocates the study of sociomaterial intra-action rather than treating work, organization and technology as interacting but separate entities. Similarly, Fenwick (2010) argues that the concept of sociomateriality, as a dynamic simultaneous association of the human and the non-human, challenges an ontology of separateness. Furthermore, Orlikowski and Scott (2008) propose that sociomateriality not only challenges a separation of technology, work and organizations but also dispenses with a focus on either human or technological agency. Orlikowski and Scott (2008) and Fenwick (2010) identify a range of concepts relating to sociomateriality and, to give a broader theoretical base from which to explore sociomateriality and identity work, we give an overview of two concepts: Actor-Network Theory (ANT), and the mangle of practice.

3.1.1 Actor-network theory

According to Fenwick (2010), ANT holds that everything is constructed through sociomaterial assemblages. This includes the identities of individual entities and actors joining together within these assemblages, their attributes and divisions (Moser and Law, 1999; Latour, 1999). Sociomaterial assemblages in this understanding may be described as networks or, as Callon (1986: 4) terms it, “complex web(s) of interrelations in which Society and Nature are intertwined”. Within these networks, entities in the form of human or non-human actors (Callon, 1986) are constantly performing and producing themselves, their identities and their relationships through such sociomaterial interlinkages. In the same way, identities and objects at work are understood to be related by continuous interaction. Building on this, ANT acknowledges the inextricably close intra-connection and equal importance of human and material agency (Jones, 1998). Nevertheless, Star (1991) argues that some actors may be more privileged than others to take part in such networks. She uses her allergy to onions as an example to outline the experiences encountered by people with a rather unusual ‘difference/dysfunction’ to those without one or those with one that is common enough to create a ‘recognizable consumer demand’ (Star, 1991: 36), for which organizations, institutions and society as a whole may have developed adjusted processes, products and structures. Star (1991) demonstrates that particularly the economy, with its cross-links and effects on society, is unlikely to deal effortlessly with unusual difference and hence reinforces the difference in question. As a result, Star (1991) disputes ANT’s claim that network are sufficiently stable for everyone. In a later part of this paper, we use Star’s (1992) argument to support the idea that mundane technologies and objects, as part of the sociomateriality of identity work, may reinforce difference for disabled people.

3.1.2 Mangle of practice

Due to the practical deficits of ANT outlined above, the theoretical perspective of ‘mangle of practice’ (Pickering, 1995; Jones, 1998) provides a more suitable conceptual basis to the research aims pursued in this paper. A pioneer within this conceptual field is Pickering (1995). Arguing that human and material agencies are created reciprocally and dynamically, Pickering’s (1995) mangle of practice concept reflects how humans and technology cannot be clearly detached from one another. He thereby challenges the existence of divisions between humans and objects which, in ANT, were still understood to be created through sociomaterial assemblages. In this way, the mangle of practice resonates directly with the renunciation of either human- or technology-centred agency (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Orlikowski, 2007;

Jones, 1998). Based on a discussion of the benefits and deficits of ANT, Jones (1998) suggests a 'double-mangle' model as a way of combining the social and the material: "The outcome of technology development and use cannot be reliably predicted as both the technical and social are mangled together in the process to produce specific situation instantiations" (Jones, 1998: 299). A slightly different terminology is that of 'everyday (i.e. continuous) sociomaterial assemblages' as constituents of humans and artefacts and related agency (Doolin and McLeod, 2012) by which relationships and performances are contingently constructed, rather than assumed in existence a priori (Suchman, 2007). In a similar vein, Orlikowski (2009) argues that the notion of sociomateriality as "entanglement in practice" (Orlikowski, 2009: 127; Suchman, 2007; Barad, 2003) and the emergence of complex and advanced contemporary technology calls for more profound study of the inextricable connection between humans and technology.

The notion of everyday sociomaterial assemblages and the related concept of "constitutive entanglement" (Barad, 2003; Orlikowski, 2007) fit with Williams and Mavin's (2012: 170) conceptualizing of impairment effects. They draw on the work of Thomas (2007: 136, emphasis in original) who conceives of impairment effects as the impact of "bodily variations designated 'impairments'". In other words, whilst bodily variations may have a direct impact upon people's social lives, impairment effects are socially contingent. Linking the concepts of bodily variation, impairment effects and 'entanglement in practice', it is a combination of bodily (or cognitive) variation(s) and social responses to these, in which impairments are designated as such, that contributes to disabled people's experiences of impairment effects (Williams and Mavin, 2012). Therefore, Thomas (2004) encourages an appreciation of the complex interlocking of social responses to disabled people and impairment effects.

3.2 Existing Identity Research on Constitutive Entanglement and The Cyborg

The way in which social and material worlds are inextricably connected and 'constitutively entangled' (Barad, 1993; Orlikowski, 2007) resembles strongly the kind of 'absolute' sociomaterial identity that Haraway (1991) coined in association with the 'cyborg', that is a hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine. The cyborg identity is reflected particularly in contemporary medicine (Haraway, 1991) and special attention has been given to the kinds of fusion which disabled individuals enter into with machines and technology. This interest may arise from Haraway's (1991: 151) view that "the cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense". Following this understanding, the cyborg identity and hence the general idea of seamless sociomaterial assemblages may yield agency possibilities for the 'different' to embrace and embody in the context of their positioning against the norm. Campbell (2009: 7) writes that "for many people deemed disabled, in the world of technoscience their relationship with non-human actants has been profoundly cyborgical and hybridizable (e.g. the use of communication and adaptive devices, implants and transplants)". Braidotti (2002) observes the coexistence of both fear of and fascination with human-technology fusions, and regards them as something that is both intentionally monstrous in its body imagery, but potent in what it offers to the understanding of difference in sociology and organization studies (Haraway, 1991). The cyborg, who is at home in both the "natural and [the] crafted" world (Haraway, 1991: 149), is seen by Suchman (2009), who draws on feminist research, as a source of inspiration to the study of difference. We now focus attention on cyborg-like understandings of the sociomaterial relations between disabled individuals, assistive technology and other more mundane technologies.

3.3 Technological and mundane artefacts and disabled individuals: implications for disabled identities and the construction of difference

In 1999, Moser and Law described their observations of the day-to-day life of a disabled woman focussing on the role of material, especially her assistive technology, but also other artefacts, such as her memoirs. Referring to her as a 'cyborg', the authors consider the levels of discretion, agency and dependency that are enabled by her assistive technology and the degree to which these 'extensions' to her own body have improved her quality of life and contribute to the construction of her identity. Symon and Pritchard (2011: 4) refer to Feenberg's (2003) analysis of Merleau Ponty's blind person's use of a cane to make the point that "the material fulfils an important identity-conveying function by its (explicit) possession" and use. As Feenberg says:

... the cane does more than sense the world; it also reveals the blind man as blind. His body is extended not only in the active dimension ... but also in the passive dimension on its own objectivity... [t]he extended body, then, is not only the body that acts through a technical mediation, but also a body that signifies itself through that mediation (Feenberg, 2003: 105, cited by Symon and Pritchard, 2011: 4).

Such use of assistive technology thereby supports the idea of a "tightly enmeshed sociomaterial whole" (Symon and Pritchard, 2011: 7) and relates to Haraway's (1991) idea of a cyborg identity, as a unity that cannot be reduced to its individual human/material components.

However, in a worldview that reduces disability to the 'deficit' of an individual's impairment, that is, to an understanding of disability as an individual rather than a social problem (Williams and Mavin, 2012), assistive technology, which is intended to aid disabled individuals in their day to day organization life, may simultaneously be seen as a means of normalising difference. This individual and medical understanding of disability mainly characterizes assistive technology through its function as a means of correcting bodily insufficiency in order to bring the body closer to the expected norm. This is because only in this form can the body function 'properly' within the standard structures and processes of a difference-oppressing working environment. Overall, therefore, despite its arguably positive aims, assistive technology may be attributed the negative connotation of a means of social oppression. As a consequence, social responses to assistive technology as a sociomaterial artefact may construct disability as an individual problem, and disabled individuals as 'different', contributing to their exclusion and marginalization. Over the course of her research, Moser changes her views on the role of assistive technology in the construction of difference for disabled people. Moser and Law (1999) refer to assistive technology in a largely positive light as helping the individual to lead a life similar to that of an individual without impairment. In a more critical review, some seven years afterwards, Moser's (2006) view on assistive technology appears somewhat more guarded. As assistive technology aims to equip people deemed 'disabled' with ability, she sees its effects as reinforcing difference by substantiating the extent that disabled individuals deviate from the perceived 'normal'. Moser (2006) notes that one's (dis)ability emerges from sociomaterial arrangements and concludes that difference needs to be accommodated rather than compensated for. The desire for the normalization of disability/difference is also questioned in Moser's (2005) paper. She provides evidence of how normalization practice is inherent in social, cultural and economic processes and is rarely challenged by disabled individuals who are affected by the resulting oppression. Like Star (1991), Moser (2005: 677) argues, therefore, that difference is

"materially produced" by economically and socially standardized structures of the environment.

Moser's (2005) argument follows her earlier finding (Moser and Law, 1999) that the benefits of assistive and other technology are only available to the disabled individual if the assistive technology functions without error. This observation indicates a related general presupposition of artefacts and sociomaterial networks which is challenged by the debate on so-called affordances of artefacts. Bloomfield, Latham and Vurdubakis (2010: 420, emphasis in original) conceptualize affordances of artefacts as "different action possibilities made available – or unavailable – to specific actors in particular settings". Reflecting a process worldview, such affordances emerge and are realized in practice as situated, ongoing accomplishments (Bloomfield et al., 2010) of sociomaterial entanglements. Bloomfield et al. (2010: 429) conclude that 'sociality and 'materiality' are irredeemably entangled with one another, and that "the relationship between 'sociality' and 'materiality' in technological artefacts is [...] one of mutual (in)determination and supplementarity". However, because of the restrictions they may encounter in the process of engaging with artefacts, particularly with standard everyday/mundane artefacts, people with impairments may not realize fully affordances of technology.

Thus, the relationship between 'sociality' and 'materiality' in technological artefacts (Bloomfield et al., 2010) reflects the possibilities that sociomaterial assemblages can offer for disabled individuals (Roulstone, 1998; Bloomfield et al., 2010). By taking a relational ontology perspective on the role and affordances of assistive technology and mundane material artefacts, and a critical poststructuralist perspective on identity work, our proposed future research agenda would explicitly dissociate itself from the marginalization of disability as an individual problem by recognizing the effects of affordances of technology for disabled individuals' identity work. Further empirical research might explore the identity-conveying functions of the material for disabled people and how possession/use of the material (for instance in the form of assistive technology) makes distinctive their identity, and offers or denies action possibilities. For instance, does use of assistive technology, designed to aid individuals with impairments to facilitate organizational day-to-day life, serve to increase their visibility within the workplace? Because they have requested something others do not use/need, do disabled people's requests for mundane artefacts (such as an 'alternative' chair or table) mark them out as 'different' and 'excluded'? Overboe (1999) suggests drawing upon a Deluzian understanding of difference could mean disability need not be an automatically negated difference, rather disability could be a difference which is neither "valued or devalued" (Overboe, 1999: 25). However, disability as negated difference and the devaluation of disabled people's lived experience "has a long history" (Overboe, 1999: 18), and it is more common for disabled peoples' requirements to be thought of as different to normative assumptions rather than as "ordinary people doing ordinary things" (Oliver, 1990: 61). Therefore, adapting Alvesson and Willmott's (2002:621) notion of the interplay of "mechanisms and practices of control" and identity regulation, we suggest that requests for legitimate organizing requirements relating to the effects of bodily impairments and variation, for instance taking the form of particular material requests, may be resisted with "more or less intentional effects" (p.625) by managers. Also, a critical poststructuralist perspective will enable us to explore the range of social, political and economic influences which shape how disabled people use technology (Kenny et al., 2011) and the affordances of technology made (un)available to them. For instance, action possibilities of mundane material objects, which are not designed specifically for use by disabled individuals, might be restricted for disabled people compared with the possibilities they would otherwise make available to non-disabled

individuals. Therefore, focusing attention on the role of materiality may problematize the influence of sociomaterial practices, based on the dominant normative discourse of ableism, for disabled peoples' identity work. Also, it may highlight the (dis)affordance of mundane material for disabled people and the implications of this for identity work. From a more positive perspective, such research would appreciate that the enabling and positive affordances for disabled individuals of technological and mundane artefacts within sociomaterial relations can only occur if their processual and situational nature is understood appropriately.

Having reviewed the role of assistive technology and other mundane artefacts in 'disabled' individual's identity work, we now turn attention to constitutive sociomaterial entanglements of disabled individuals' bodies and identities.

4 Human bodies as sociomaterial artefacts in identity work

Researchers have explored the role of human bodies as sociomaterial artefacts in identity work processes. For example, Boler (2007) provides an exploration of the embodied self as constructed through computer-mediated communication (CMC) and cyberspace. The marketing hype around cyberspace-mediated interaction promises an anonymous "communicative world" (Boler, 2007: 153), where identity is dissolved from the material body and its race, gender and other material attributes. However, Boler (2007) found that users, when trying to make sense of their interaction with other humans, were eager to circumvent this bodily anonymity by associating this interaction with their counterparts' bodily features. Boler (2007) provides anecdotal evidence through the example of a lecturer of an online university course and of participants in an online chat room. Firstly, the black female teacher of an online African-American Studies course is reported to perceive her gender and skin colour as essential elements of her teaching that she felt threatened to lose when delivering the course via the internet. Secondly, the study of the behaviour of participants in an online chat room found that it was common for chat partners to start off their conversation by asking for their conversational partner's gender, skin colour and location arguably to enable them to understand their partner's utterances and interpret their relationship in a social context. It can be observed that even in cyberspace, which is at times deliberately designed to factor out the material body as a resource for identity work, the body still takes the role of a "final arbiter of authentic identity" (Boler, 2007: 157). This suggests that humans cannot perceive human identity without its association with a material body on which identity is imprinted (Campbell, 2009).

5 The embodied self and difference: their role in disabled individuals' identity work

As shown in the example above, the human body is linked inherently to identity. Sluskaya and Schreven (2007) draw on the work of Merleau-Ponty who argues that our bodies are the starting points for our actions and practices and are, thus, the outline of our identity projects. As an illustration of this, Campbell (2009) discusses how pedagogy is intrinsically embodied and how teachers' identities are performed through their bodies. However, she argues that when the teacher is disabled, there is a "radical de-coupling" of embodiment and pedagogy, because the positioning of the disabled body as "*inherently negative* disallows the pedagogical imagination to consider disabled teachers as knowers" (Campbell, 2009: 119, emphasis in original). Edwards and Imrie (2003) also portray the body as a 'bearer' of 'corporeal' values inscribed by the social surroundings and reflected by everyday practice.

The impaired body, in contrast, is seen to lack this inscription of value due to its common evaluation as "broken, incompetent, powerless, and dependent" (Edwards and Imrie, 2003: 252), resulting in disabled individuals' disregard and marginalization which in turn affect their identity work.

Feminist writers have drawn on the human body as a carrier of individual identity (Braidotti, 2002, 2003; Garland-Thomson, 2002; Meekosha, 1998; Morris, 1996; Wendell, 1996). In doing so, many have emphasized and fundamentally criticized the normative body as a reference point for identity construction whilst drawing attention to the alienation and pejoration that tends to occur in cases of deviance from this norm. Therefore, any bodily difference from the socially accepted norm influences identity work. Within this process, "bodily, emotional and social differences are mutually constitutive" (Marks, 1999: 611). Braidotti (2002) argues that the normative body (male, white, heterosexual, non-disabled) is a product of Western/European culture and society, reinforcing its doctrine as a means of restriction, pejoration and alienation of alternative forms of embodiment and identity ('difference') and upholding difference from the norm as 'Other' or even as 'monstrous'. With regards to bodily impairment, Braidotti argues that "identity is coded on the body by a process of psychic mapping which functions by indexing certain organs onto specific functions [...] Organs and functions, desires and 'proper' objects need to be 'joined' in socially acceptable assemblages" (Braidotti, 2002: 123). Accordingly, it is inferred that "the selection of 'proper' objects [...] requires at the same time the elimination of others as improper or 'abject'" (Braidotti, 2002: 141). Odette (1994) also discusses the central role of difference to the socially and culturally constructed 'acceptable', 'desirable' and 'attractive' female body. She highlights the difficulties that individuals with a body that deviates from the 'norm' of the white, non-disabled, heterosexual, able-bodied man encounter in relation to their identity construction. In this context, disabled women are ascribed decreased social visibility, which makes them experience "alienation from themselves and their bodies" (Odette, 1994: 42).

By drawing on the shared concept of difference from the normative body and therefore assumed abnormality-inferiority, Garland-Thomson (2002) paves the way for a constructive link between feminist, disability and identity research. Recognising that the study of disability can provide a valuable contribution to identity studies, her work seeks to integrate the two by looking at identity construction in the context of embodiment and the social and cultural environment. The process of identity construction is here characterized as one by which "the self materializes in response to an embodied engagement with its environment, both social and concrete" (Garland-Thomson, 2002: 20) indicating that difference and the resulting clash with the social expectations and a standard physical environment are crucial influencing factors to this materialization. In a similar way, Zitzelsberger's (2005) study explored how women, born with physical impairments, experienced their embodied selves. She found that the ways in which women's embodiments were experienced by themselves and by others paradoxically as both visible and invisible, implying that sociomaterial relations were "contingent across sociomaterial places" (Zitzelsberger, 2005: 389).

6 Sociomateriality and disabled individuals' identity work: a critical poststructuralist research agenda

Orlikowski and Scott (2008) conclude that, because work practices are inherently sociomaterial, we must understand sociomaterial (re)configurations to understand work. By extension to the notion of identity work, the implications are particularly clear. We must

understand sociomaterial (re)configurations to understand identity work. Sociomaterial practices don't just mediate identity work, they perform individual identities.

Overall, the bodies of literature presented illustratively unveil the often overlooked and surprisingly intolerant situation that is still existent within, and even reinforced by, contemporary social and political structures embedded within sociomaterial practices and places. Campbell (2009: 3) explicates the "ableist regulatory norms" which we propose provide the dominant order for realizing sociomaterial relations and constructing disabled peoples' identities. These dominant ableist norms produce a binary system where able(d) bodies are understood as the perfect/correct form of the human body whilst placing impaired bodies at the negative, pejorative end of the self-other continuum (Campbell, 2009). Within Disability Studies, Campbell (2009) argues that a re-conceptualization of identity is needed that goes beyond the material body and its social and political imprints so that the various states of perceived bodily ableism can be deprived of their role as an evaluative frame of reference. Whilst ableism as a normative expectation shaping constructions of disability as negated difference is established within Disability Studies, Organization Studies have failed, until recently, to include ableism in the problematization of social relations (Williams and Mavin, 2012). The oppressive set up of the social and organising environment, with its reference to the accepted and expected norms of ableism, is a key site for disabled people's identity work and a source of exclusion of individuals with negatively constructed difference. In this socially disabling environment, the 'problem' of difference is constantly produced and reinforced. This lack of problematization of the normative effect of ableism would suggest that a need for 'normalization' is imposed unchallenged on those that depart from the social norm whilst leaving no room for the inclusion of disability as a "part of the spectrum of human variation" (Garland-Thomson, 2005: 1568). Rather than striving for a "normalization of bodies that deviate from configurations dictated by the dominant order" (Garland-Thomson, 2005: 1579), Braidotti (2003) proposes an understanding of each individual body as a unique assemblage of differences, thereby reflecting the role of sociomaterial relationships in this process.

In addition to appreciating fully the effect of dominant ableist regulatory norms on disabled people's experiences within organizational contexts (Williams and Mavin, 2012), we have proposed that future research might fuse the 'Disability Studies lens' with the role of sociomaterial practices related to the use of assistive technology, mundane artefacts, and the embodied self in exploring disabled people's identity work. By taking a socially constructed view of disability, and a critical poststructuralist perspective on identity work, we propose that conceptualizations of identity work, within Organization Studies, might be extended by developing understanding of the sociomaterial entanglement of the human and the materiality of bodies and other artefacts. The concept of sociomaterial identity (Symon and Pritchard, 2010) opens up the possibility of exploring not only the relational social and discursive interconnection between self and others but also the social and material (sociomaterial) interconnection between the material, in the form of the body and other material artefacts, and identity work for disabled people. Empirical research in this area, based around the questions posed in section 2 of this paper, has the potential to develop further understanding of sociomaterial identities for disabled people and to make further contributions to Critical Disability Studies in opening up further theorizing of impaired bodies.

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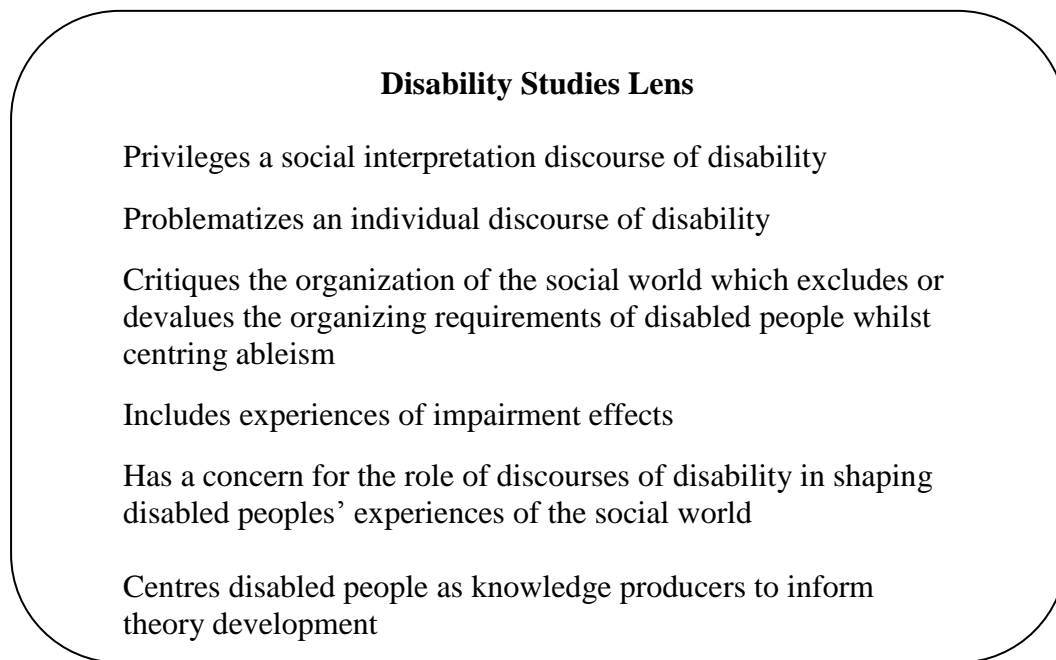


Figure 1: Disability Studies Lens (Williams and Mavin, 2012:173)

	Discourses of impairment, disability and ableism		
	Individual model	Social model	Social interpretation
Impairment	Biological characteristic	Biological characteristic	Impairment effects experienced and a discursive social construction
Disability	Consequence of biological impairment Personal tragedy	Socially created through economic and social relations and structural factors Social oppression	Discursive social construction and outcome of social organizing processes and practices Social construction
Ableism	Theoretically absent	Acknowledges non-disability as an organizing norm, but does not engage theoretically with ableism	The privileging of non-disability as an organizing norm Theorized as an important contribution to the construction of organizing contexts

Figure 2: Discourses of Impairment, Disability and Ableism (Williams and Mavin, 2012: 172)